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VADE MECUM, VOLVENTIBUS ANNIS

THE MAYANS
SAN ANTONIO,
TEXAS

Degree 6 - 7

Number 96

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PHILOSOPHY SERIES THREE

6th and 7th Degrees



NUMBER FOUR

of a Series of Seven

EXPERIENCING THE DIVINE

(SOME WHO MET GOD)

The Father of a Nation ... The Story of a Dream ... The "I Am" Speaks to a Shepherd
Cloven Tongues of Fire ... A Watch in the Desert

Beloved Companion:

We learn by experience as we go along but at the beginning we must often learn by observing others. To consider the workings of the Divine in a few notable lives should help the student to better recognize and analyze experiences in his own life or the lives of others about him. In the first scene of the five described to you in this revelation, your Instructor gladly enriches you with the TWO ESSENTIALS. Each succeeding scene carries its own revelation. Let us begin our studies with Scene One, entitled:

The Father of a Nation

Our survey begins at Haran, near the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Abram, a man of means and influence, lived there with his aging wife, Sarai, and some of his kinsmen. They had come there with Abram's father, Terah, from the Chaldean city of Ur. The group was on its way to the Land of Canaan (now Palestine) along the Eastern Mediterranean Coast but had paused in Haran. There Terah had died and the rest had lingered on in the rich and inviting river valley.

One day as Abram went about his business, "something" stopped him in his tracks. We are told only that God spoke to him and told him to leave that country and move on to a land that should be shown him. In that country, God said, He would make Abram a great nation; that He would bless him and make his name great and, that while Abram made himself a blessing God would bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him. The final promise was that in Abram should all the families of the earth be blessed.

That is about all we are told about the experience. The records of such things in that day were very brief and with what voice God spoke to Abram is not explained. The occasion may have been a dramatic one but we have nothing to indicate that it was. It would rather appear that as Abram went about the work of the day, or meditated, or prayed, the still, small voice spoke within him and he suddenly found himself conscious of what he should do next. It is quite possible that no one else knew of the experience.

Have there not been times when something you had been wondering about, trying to decide, or waiting for the right time to do, suddenly cleared up and you found yourself ready and the road open? You could hardly wait to get started with the matter for you knew the time had come. Did it occur to you then that the voice of the Divine had spoken to you? Such things happen in the most ordinary places and at the most ordinary times. Any day or night anywhere is good enough for God to speak to us.

There is nothing to tell whether Abram made any demonstration or sought any publicity. Probably not, though, for he had things to do. The story tersely says that he went as God had told him, taking Sarai and some of his kinfolk along. It was not in the exuberance of youth that he undertook the expedition, either. He was 75 years old at the time.

What did the appointed country turn out to be? It was the Land of Canaan, to which the group had been on its way in the first place. God had long-time plans for what has long since come to be the Holy Land.

The story of the journey is long and the details need not be recounted here. Let us speak of only one, which rises in the narrative every little while like the chorus of a song. Wherever Abram paused on that journey he set up a rude altar of stones and worshiped the Divine. It was no accident that this man of long ago was so conscious of the divine voice. He did what would keep him sensitive to it. He cultivated his soul life and he obeyed divine commands. These are the two essentials.

God kept His promise about making for Abram a great nation. Abram and his wife were both advanced in years but God gave them a son, Isaac, and through him and his descendants the promise of a great nation was to be fulfilled. Isaac had TWO sons - Esau, from whom sprang Edom, a wild and rebellious tribe; and Jacob (or Israel) from whom sprang the most idealistic people of ancient times and the ones who gave the world religion as Greece gave it culture and Rome gave it law and government.

Abram, now called Abraham, had not heard the still, small voice for nothing. God had a purpose in speaking to him and Abraham accepted that purpose as his own. God does not reveal Himself to us for our amusement. He always has a reason. If He speaks to YOU the experience will carry a DEFINITE RESPONSIBILITY. Not to obey would probably mean that you would hear His voice no more.

II. The Story of a Dream.

The next scene is laid in a lonely spot near Haran. A young traveler passing through looked about and seeing that the night was falling, he stopped and made his simple camp.

The traveler was Jacob, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. His mother, Rebekah, whose favorite he was, had asked his father to send him back to the old family home to find a wife, as she did not like the idea of a Canaanite girl for a daughter-in-law. So Jacob had set out on a journey which had now brought him near the place from which his grandfather long before had started to Canaan by divine command.

What kind of person was Jacob? His name meant Supplanter and a supplanter he was. His brother Esau was a man of the hunt, whose life was bound up in his physical senses. Jacob was a man who tended fields and herds, was rather shrewd and selfish and had a designing and partial mother on his side. He had even set a trap for Esau and obtained his inheritance for a bit of enticing food when the hunter was hungry. A simple tale of simple times but it gives us a scene with a lesson.

Jacob was neither better nor worse than Esau. The difference was that Esau's eyes were on the ground, while Jacob sometimes looked up at the sky. That is a decisive difference for the man whose eyes are on the clay remains what he is, while the man who looks up at the sky has the universe and eternity to grow in. Esau would never change but there would be a time when Jacob would cease to be the Supplanter and be called Israel, a Prince of God. At this time he was only a youth looking for a wife - and anything else of value he could acquire.

It wasn't much of a bed he could make there. He only took a stone for a pillow and lay down on the ground under the stars to catch a few hours of rest before proceeding to Haran. He was weary and fell asleep and as he slept he dreamt. If Esau had been dreaming that night it probably would have been of game to kill or a meal to eat. Not so with Jacob, who sometimes looked at the sky.

In his dream Jacob saw a ladder set up on the earth and its top reached to heaven. It was not empty, for angels (messengers of God) were ascending and descending on it. We have said that such dreams are symbolic and here was a symbol that the way between heaven and earth is open, and that the angels, which are the good thoughts of men, travel freely back and forth between them. In the dream the voice of God sounded from heaven, promising Jacob the land on which he was and that through him should be fulfilled the promise of a great nation made to Abraham. God was working toward a plan to raise up an important people and Canaan had been selected as its home. Jacob was a link in that plan, just as YOU may be in some NEWER plan, small or great.

In the morning Jacob awoke from his sleep with the strange feeling one always has after a remarkable dream. "Surely the Lord is in this place", he said. "This is the house of God, the gate of heaven." So he set his stony pillow up as a memorial of his experience and named the place Beth-el, which means "House of God". Then he vowed loyalty and obedience to the One who had appeared to him in his dream.

It took Jacob a long time to redeem that promise. He had to be tried by other experiences but his allegiance was finally clear and complete. Then his name was changed to Isra-el, Prince of God, a name that was handed down to his people. You see, God can wait, even for some chosen ONE to learn and develop. He has often to be extremely patient with us while He is preparing us for a FULLER KNOWLEDGE of His will and PARTICIPATION IN IT.

In the beginning, Jacob was no better than Esau but he was saved by the

fact that he saw a Gleam, a flash of Light, and followed it. Esau is the father of those who would sell all they have for the satisfaction of physical desire. Jacob is the father of those who dream of heaven and angels, even though their pillow may be a stone. It is the THOUGHT LIFE that makes THE difference.

Jacob finally kept his word with God, which made it possible for God to keep His word with Jacob. The result of that fulfillment was the Jewish people who first gave the world its greatest revelation of God, its greatest wealth of sacred scriptures and finally its Savior. With human help it is wonderful what God will sometimes do with a dream.

III. The "I Am" Speaks to a Shepherd.

Our next scene opens on the slope of Mt. Horeb in the Egyptian Land of Midian. For a reason he may not have known, a shepherd led his flock to a quiet place back of a wilderness. As he roamed about he suddenly noticed a bush on fire at his feet. He had seen bushes on fire before but this one was different. The fire did not spread and the bush was not consumed. All this, it seems, was to attract his attention and when that was done a "voice" spoke. The record says it spoke from the burning bush and no doubt it sounded so; but a divine power was quickening certain PERCEPTIONS within the shepherd's own soul.

He was Moses, a Jew brought up and educated in Egypt. How he came there is a long story. When the Israelites numbered only 70 they had gone to Egypt to escape a famine in Canaan. There they had multiplied and been enslaved. This man, Moses, had escaped both death and enslavement in babyhood. The REASON will unfold with the story.

THE "VOICE" from the burning bush first reminded Moses that he was on holy ground and must be reverent. It then introduced itself as the God of his fathers and went on to say that the time had come when the Israelites must be delivered from bondage and led out of Egypt and back to Canaan.

Moses remonstrated that he was not the man for any such work of leadership but the divine voice disproved every objection he made. Finally, Moses agreed to undertake the mission, with the promised help of Aaron, his brother.

The story of deliverance is a long one, too. The way led through 40 years of wilderness wandering but when Moses had finished his course and turned the leadership over to Joshua, Canaan was in sight. It was no easy thing to which the voice of God had called him and there had been no promise that it would be. The troubles of Moses began the day he assumed this place of leadership. Keeping a wilful people going, through hardship and danger is about the most difficult thing one could undertake. Probably Moses never had another good night's rest but he got Israel out of Egypt. He had obeyed the VOICE OF GOD, and was working with DESTINY.

When the argument by the burning bush was done and Moses had agreed to undertake the commission, he raised one more question. When he returned and made the announcement to his people, he said, he would tell them the God of their fathers had sent him but they would not understand and would ask His name. Their name for God must have been lost to memory through their generations of bondage. The voice replied that if Moses wanted a name for God it should be "I Am That I Am." "Tell

them that I Am hath sent you", the voice said. It so happens that the name Jehovah or Yahweh comes from the same root as does the Hebrew word for I Am.

Here, then, is THE NAME by which God called Himself. Our names for the Divine are many but God's own name for it is RICH WITH MEANING. God is the principle of existence, the One who always has been and always will be, the origin of all things, the source of all life, pure BEING. When YOU think back of ALL created things to the Creator, that is He. When YOU think PAST all material things to the ONE who made them possible, THAT IS HE. When YOU think past ALL persons who have EVER been to the ONE at whose flame of life their candles were lit, THAT IS HE. Such thinking is good exercise for you. Do SOME of it EVERY day.

The Jews were liberated in divine thought, the hour when Moses saw the burning bush and heard the VOICE of I AM. They were liberated in actuality when after many days they finally crossed the Egyptian border. Things happen first in the Divine Mind, then the influence of the thought is projected like a moving picture into human affairs. The first takes place in the infinite silence. The second requires the aid of human MINDS, HANDS, and VOICES. THAT was where Moses came in and where ALL must come in, whom God is ready to use in the fulfillment of His plans.

The divine hand had shaped all these things in an orderly way. Beginning by speaking to Abram in Haran, God had evolved a race and brought it to a national home in Canaan. That is the way Providence works, and history takes place. That is WHY it is so IMPORTANT that EACH OF US keep fit to EXPERIENCE THE DIVINE.

IV. Cloven Tongues of Fire.

We now move past many other stories worth telling and pause away over in New Testament times. The Great Teacher, our Great Companion, had completed His earthly mission, been crucified, risen from the dead and finally returned to the "realm of the unseen". He had told His disciples to wait at Jerusalem until they had further communication from heaven. This they had done, patiently and systematically. For ten days a hundred and twenty of them had kept a watch going in "an upper room", some coming and going but SOME ALWAYS THERE.

The end of TEN days was the end of FIFTY days after the resurrection. The purposes of God seem timed by some infinite clock for on THAT day the group in the upper room felt the stirring of a Presence not their own. Their minds were alerted. Their hearts were moved by strong, sweeping influences. They felt like different persons than before. As they looked about wonderingly at each other their surprised eyes saw an amazing symbol. "SOMETHING" THAT LOOKED LIKE A PARTED TONGUE OF FLAME RESTED ABOVE EACH HEAD.

Like the fire in the burning bush, this flame did not spread or consume. It was an image the spiritual perceptions of the beholder were prompted to see. Certainly it was A SIGN of SOMETHING that was ABOUT to HAPPEN. Presently these people began speaking with a freedom many of them had never known. Word spread about that strange things were happening and a crowd of curious persons soon gathered. Among the onlookers were people of MANY lands and tongues but EACH heard the disciples speaking as in his own language. Tongues of fire were indeed cutting through barriers of silence.

Then Peter stood up among the eleven remaining disciples to speak. It was he who had been named Simon but whose name had now been changed to Petros, the Greek word for Rock. When Peter opened his mouth it was quite apparent that a tongue of flame was speaking. Certainly it was not the fisherman of the old days.

He had always been ready enough to talk but his talk had never been very well considered. He was impetuous and quick-tempered and did not always think before he spoke. His speeches were always short for he never had much to say.

THIS time it was different. He spoke at length. He spoke his own thoughts CLEARLY. He quoted freely and accurately from the prophets and the psalms of David. His thoughts were ORDERLY and his sentences EXACT. The venom had gone from his speech; while it was direct, it was also persuasive.

He recounted old prophecies. He retold the story of Jesus. He fearlessly placed responsibility for the Master's death. Those he accused stood in fear before him and asked if there was any hope for them. He reminded them that the way to a forgiving God is ALWAYS open and in that manner they might save themselves from the evil times. Three thousand people took their stand with him and became a part of the Christian movement that day. It TAKES a tongue of flame to get results like that. Through many wonderful days, when the freshness of a great experience of God was still on the apostles, their loosened tongues had the same effect on the people, who yielded by thousands.

What had happened to Peter had also happened to all the rest. They went out from the upper room that day to LIVE with NEW GOODNESS and SPEAK with NEW BOLDNESS. SOMETHING had given them release from all cringing and confused silence. They had ALWAYS had a message but after Pentecost they ALSO had POWER to EXPRESS it. The vitality THEY began planting in the life of the world is that from which ALL Christian movements have grown up to this time.

The many remarkable events related in the rest of the Book of Acts could never have happened had it not been for the experience these WATCHERS had in the "upper room". It did NOT mean that after all the long centuries God had finally come to "His people". It meant that after all the centuries A GROUP of people had made just the right approach to attain the CONSCIOUSNESS of the fact that GOD WAS NEAR, as He had ALWAYS been; to PERCEIVE THE PRESENCE that had been there all the time.

This had happened not by accident but by unerring laws. This was a collective experience. The personality of each one in the company had STIMULATED the perceptions and reactions of all the rest. They were gathered in "a place" where there were no negative influences to neutralize the results. Praying and waiting patiently, they had REALLY given God a chance to manifest HIMSELF. Mental laws are such that something is CERTAIN to happen when these requirements are met. Hence, "the tongue of flame". Think about this, please.

V. A Watch in the Desert.

We now move still further into New Testament times. A young Jewish convert to Christianity, Saul of Tarsus, had disappeared and there is great wonder as to what could have become of him. It seems that:

While on the way to Damascus, to persecute Christians he had experienced an overpowering revelation of the risen Christ. Brilliant and educated young fanatic that he was, nothing but a violent experience would have done. Struck blind, he was taken to a friendly home where after a few days he regained his sight. He was then completely devoted to the way he had hated.

Suddenly he was seen no more. What had become of him? Some had supposed he would immediately become active in the cause but instead he had disappeared. Had he lost his mind, or had something happened to him?

Three years later he reappeared but more changed than ever. The fiery young zealot had grown thoughtful, quiet, reverent. He said he was then ready to be of any assistance he could to the Apostles and the Master.

Where had he been those three years? Except for a short time spent in Damascus, he had been in the Arabian desert, alone with God, thinking things out, letting his mind clear, searching his heart to be SURE of its LOYALTY and FAITH.

Why had he not entered the public ministry at once after his violent conversion? Most young men would, especially when trained in the best schools as he had been. He knew that while that had its value it was not sufficient preparation to become a builder of the new and better world. So he had gone to the desert to do just what YOU are doing - to seek an EXPERIENCE of the DIVINE. Did he have it? His great life and work should be enough to answer that.

What happened during those long months in the lonely desert silence? If he had an experience of the Divine, what form did it take? We might have a record of that. Let us see. Please turn to the Twelfth Chapter of Second Corinthians and read the first ten verses.

This paragraph is an explanation of the sufferings Paul endured but it begins with a reason why they have not mattered much. He says he might glory if it were advisable, hinting that he has something to glory about.

Then he says he knew a man, some fourteen years before, to whom strange and wonderful things happened. He says he does not know whether this man was in the body or out of it when he had these experiences but he was caught up into Paradise and there heard things it would not be lawful to speak in human ears. None of those who have come back from the Beyond have told anything about it. You see, a seal of secrecy is set upon the lips of anyone who has such a privilege.

On behalf of this man, Paul says, he will glory. This and all the language used in his mention of this whole matter seems to suggest that the man of whom he is speaking, was HIMSELF. To say so might seem too much like boasting. Perhaps he was reminded in Paradise that these are not things to boast about but that the truly privileged ARE the truly humble.

Perhaps then this is at least a hint of what was happening in the Arabian desert. It had been an excellent place to go to experience the Divine. Its silence was like a vast prayer closet, closed and locked according to the Master's instructions. Saul had dreams and visions in his eyes when he returned from the desert and went up to Jerusalem to offer his services to the Apostles. When you see dreams and visions in someone's eyes you may know that somewhere along the way he has met the Eternal.

In W. Somerset Maugham's story, "The Razor's Edge", a sage sends a young man into the mountains to dwell alone and contemplate the Divine. After he has dwelt with the silences several days, the teacher goes to see him and ask the results. The young man tells in humble rapture how the Divine has seemed nearer and nearer, until at last there is a great moment when there is no longer any gulf between them and that they are as one. God is even in the marketplace but we hear Him better in the silence of the forest, the desert, or the mountains.

Never think Paul became the leader and builder he was just because he was shrewd or persistent. It was because he had met the Divine and come to terms with Destiny. One who tries to live and work by his own wisdom will only be a clatter in the machinery but one who unites himself with the divine purpose goes forth to victory. Many ordinary lives would have been GREAT if they had gone to the desert to THINK things through and fortunately one can find a desert anywhere.

Beloved Mayan Companion:

These have been only a few chosen cases. Read others and think about them. Read of Jacob wrestling at Jabbok; the child, Samuel, in the house of Eli; the CALLS of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the experience of John on Patmos. Read also the experiences of Mohammed, Gautama Buddha, St. Augustine, Mahatma Ghandi and others, who, in terms of their own times and situations, have had unusual spiritual experiences. Do not think you have to be LIKE any of them. Any experience you have MUST BE YOUR OWN.

May You Be Richly Rewarded.

Vade Mecum Volventibus Annis,
Your Class Instructor.